

Merritt Parkway, Mianus River Culvert  
Spanning the Mianus River at the 8.3 mile mark  
on the Merritt Parkway  
Stamford  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-74

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

## **HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD**

### **Merritt Parkway, Mianus River Culvert**

HAER No. CT-74

**Location:** Spanning the Mianus River at the 8.3 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Stamford, Fairfield County, Connecticut

UTM: 18.618470.4550675  
Quad: Stamford, Connecticut

**Construction Date:** 1937

**Engineer:** Connecticut Highway Department

**Contractor:** Osborn-Barnes Construction Company  
Bristol, Connecticut

**Present Owner:** Connecticut Department of Transportation  
Wethersfield, Connecticut

**Present Use:** Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross the Mianus River

**Significance:** The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.

**Historians:** Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian  
Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer  
August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

## LOCAL HISTORY

In 1640, agents of the New Haven Colony bought land on the banks of the Rippowam River where it meets the Long Island Sound. The following year, twenty-nine families from Wethersfield purchased these lands and moved there under the leadership of the Reverend Adam Davenport. The small settlement took the name Stamford even though it was still under the jurisdiction of the New Haven Colony. Stamford would continue to grow, and at one point included parts of Greenwich, Bedford, Pound Ridge, New Canaan, and Darien. In 1685, Stamford received its town patent from the Connecticut General Assembly. By 1700 its population had grown to 585; over the next century this number increased dramatically to 4,465.<sup>1</sup>

"Stamford began as a typical rural New England village and remained an agrarian community throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."<sup>2</sup> The region maintained around 4,000 residents until the arrival of the railroad in 1848. The introduction of the train meant that Stamford was less than two hours from New York City. The railroad also caused a boom in manufacturing. By 1850 the population increased to 5,000, and thirty years later this number more than doubled to 11,000.

Stamford's proximity to New York, combined with inexpensive land, and the availability of cheap foreign-born labor enabled many local companies to prosper and expand. The Stamford Manufacturing Company, the St. John Woodworking Company, the Stamford Woolen Mills, and the Yale & Towne Manufacturing Company, employed thousands of workers by the early 1890s.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>D. Hamilton Hurd, History of Fairfield County, Connecticut, (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis Co., 1881), 692.

<sup>2</sup>Wayne Russell, "That Special Blend--Stamford's Melting Pot," Stamford Past and Present, 1641-1976, (Stamford: Stamford Bicentennial Committee, 1976), 67.

<sup>3</sup>Russell, 67.

With this expansion of manufacturing came increased traffic on the main artery through town, the Boston Post Road. By the end of World War I, local residents were clamoring for a solution to the vehicular congestion. Unlike other communities along the Merritt that suffered through many conflicts, most residents in Stamford worked together to have the roadway completed as soon as possible.<sup>4</sup>

### BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Originating in New York State, the Mianus River forms the Samuel J. Bargh Reservoir in the northern part of Stamford before flowing south under the Merritt Parkway and emptying into Cos Cob Harbor at the Long Island Sound. The Osborn-Barnes Construction Company of Danbury, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt from Guinea Road, in Stamford, to Ponus Ridge Road, in New Canaan (ConnDot project #180-31). The contract for the Mianus River Culvert also went to the Osborn-Barnes Construction Company (ConnDot project #not listed).<sup>5</sup> The culvert cost \$30,001 and was completed in 1937. The paving work for this region of the Merritt extended from Taconic Road to Wire Mill Road, in Stamford. This contract was awarded to the New Haven Construction Company of New Haven, CT (ConnDot project #180-92). The Mianus River Culvert has received little maintenance since it was built. Recently some spalling concrete was removed and patched.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>"Merritt Parkway Opens," Stamford Advocate, 3 July 1938, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

<sup>6</sup>Mianus River Bridge, DOT #701; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

### BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Mianus River Culvert carries the river well below the Merritt Parkway. The culvert is composed of double-span, reinforced-concrete beams supported by solid abutments on each end and closely-spaced square concrete columns in the center. The beam deepens slightly at each support. The sloping wing walls appear not to be monolithic with the abutments and are placed at various angles to the abutments.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hurd, D. Hamilton. History of Fairfield County, Connecticut. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis Co., 1881.

Russell, Wayne. "That Special Blend--Stamford's Melting Pot." Stamford Past and Present, 1641-1976. Stamford: Stamford Bicentennial Committee, 1976.

Stamford Bicentennial Committee. Stamford Past and Present, 1641-1976. Stamford: Stamford Bicentennial Committee, 1976.

Stamford Advocate. 1937-1939.

-----, Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.

-----, Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

### PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.